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VERSICULI



MALCOLM CLAYTON BURKE

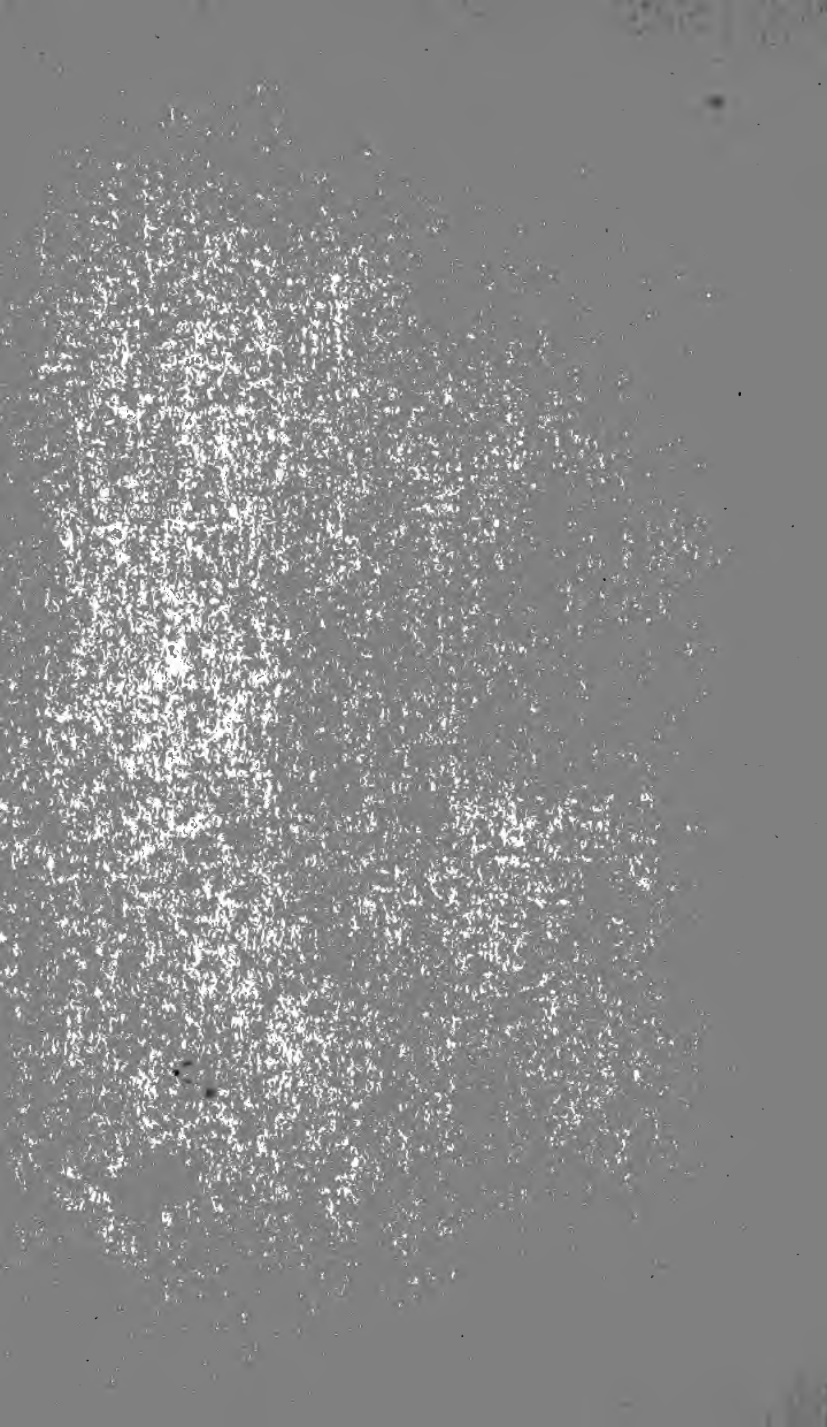


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VERSICULI

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VERSICULI

BY

MALCOLM CLAYTON BURKE
"



NEW YORK
MCMXV

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1915

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TO
THE MEMORY OF MY FATHER

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VERSICULI

Heard melodies are sweet; but those unheard
Are sweeter. Therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endeared,
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone.

—KEATS.

VERSICULI

THE PILGRIM

If I pitch my tent on the bare hilltop,
Bid me not stop, bid me not stop;
'Tis but a moment's resting spell,
'Tis not to dwell, 'tis not to dwell;
For the buoyant gale sweeps through the pine,
It leaves no trace, it leaves no sign,
It hastens on strange lands to try,—
So will I, so will I.

If I build my fire by the clear roadside,
Say not, Abide; say not, Abide;
If I spread my cloak on the meadow gay,
'Tis not to stay, 'tis not to stay;
For the light cloud-shapes drift over the green
And an eagle's shadow flits between,
And cloud and bird go racing by,—
So will I, so will I.

If I lay my staff in the shady fern,
Bid me not turn, bid me not turn;
If I pause to drink at the brooklet's bend,
'Tis not the end, 'tis not the end.

For the waters leap unweariedly
Down to the valley, vast and free,
Down to the sea where the waves foam high
And sing their song to the arching sky,—
So will I, so will I.

NOCTURNE

Come through the dusk to me;
Dark night shall set thee free—
Night and her mystery,
Night and her charm.

What though the classic dome
Crown thy bright palace-home,
Whiter than ocean foam

Tossed by the storm?

O'er my bared head is bent
God's own clear firmament,
Framed without rift or rent,
Spacious and wide.

What though thy shining hair
Decked be with jewel rare?
Ne'er art thou half so fair
As by my side.

Ere harp or horn resound,
Ere yet full cups go round,
I keep on hallowed ground
Vigil for thee:

Ere yet the feast be laid,
Ere harp or horn be played,
Creep forth through silent shade
Hither to me.

While down the lofty porch
Far flames the ruddy torch,
Burning each marble arch

Gold with its gleams,
Steal through the dusk with me,
Calm night shall set thee free—
Night and her memory,
Night and her dreams.

IN THAT STILL HOUR

'Twas thou who spoke
In that still hour the quaint familiar word.
Vainly I sought thee through the moonlit grove;
Nowhere stood forth the vision that I love,
And on the greensward not a footfall stirred.
Yet, when that fleeting tremor caught mine ear,
My dull heart bled anew with joy and fear,
And in my soul the revelation broke,—
'Twas thou who spoke.

'Twas thy caress.
The bitter rebel tears had stained my cheek,
When came the touch of gentle finger-tips
Upon my brow, and pressure of swift lips.
I dared not move nor speak;
I could but blindly pray
The Lord of Death to bid that moment stay:—
Lest in long after-days I doubly miss
Thy tenderness.

MY STAR

Thou'rt not my star

Who sheddest mellow beams upon my natal hour;
Who from the pinnacle of thine heavenly tower
Hast might to mould the course of peace and war.

Thou radiant source of light and life and power,
Thou art not my star.

O nameless orb whose path no eye may trace;

Not crowned and jewelled as thy brethren are;
Unseen, unworshipped, circling wide through space,
Forever vanished from thine ancient place;

Blasted, bereft of power to make or mar,—
Thou art my star.

THE SPHINX

Bowed down by the weight of æons
And crushed with a burden of time,
I sit an immortal witness,
Sorrowful yet sublime.
Silent amid the silence,
Alone in the gray solitude,
The sea and the stars and the desert
Are masters of my mood.

My lips are dumb with foreboding,
My limbs are rigid with awe,
I am held in eternal bondage
To a mute, unspoken law.
I am the mourner of nations,
The tomb of the hopes of men;
My frozen tongue will not utter
What my burning eyes have seen.

I am the Past unburied,
I am the ghost unlaid,
The sin that hath found no pardon,
The god that man's hand hath made.

I count the sands of the desert,
The waves of the sea I record,
And I number the nameless millions
Who fall by the tyrant's sword.

I search out the seed of disaster,
I fathom the fountains of crime,
And sit an immortal witness,
Terrible, yet sublime;
I sit here against the judgment,
Steadfastly waiting the day,
When the hidden thing shall be opened,
And mine image shall perish away.

TO THE UNKNOWN GOD

I ask not to know Thy plan,
If I feel but the stress of Thy will
Constraining the spirit of man
And bidding his passions be still.

I care not to utter Thy name;
I shall know it if Thou art near
By the red of the lightning flame
Or the murmur of harp in mine ear.

I care not for promise or vow;
I seek not a pledge nor a sign;
Thou are free from the bonds of the Now,
And the infinite future is Thine.

I ask not to see Thy face
If I have but the lift of Thy hand
To steady my step by Thy pace
And to tarry where Thou dost stand.

UNANSWERED

Whether this meed of life be sacred boon;
If it be curse to see the light of day;
I had not dreamed the child could doubt so soon.
Would God that I might answer, Yea and Nay.

I, cunning mender of the broken toy;
I, wizard master of the school-room task;
Am shown a dumb, dishonored oracle. My boy,
Thou hast not chosen wisely whom to ask.

Ah what a gallant fable I might tell,
Ah what a glorified and saintly lie,
Did I not sit beneath the instant spell
Of that clear brow and that unswerving eye.

The world's an angel's playground, thou mayst learn;
The world perchance is but a devil's scope;
Or else a waste of shifting sands that yearn
To choke the green oasis of our hope.

A weight of meditation bows thine head.

I too had planned to think it out some day,
And find amid the tangle one sure thread
To guide us as I led thee on thy way.

Lead thou, my son, and I will follow thee.

No backward glance; trust me, I'll hold thee fast
Till, launched upon that grim, insatiate sea,
Shalt thou for me prove pilot at the last.

TO A FRIEND

Too well I learn thy worth now thou art lost.

I mingled with thee in the light of day
And said, 'Tis but a stranger's path hath crossed
My chosen way.

I said, A billow lifted by the wind,
And sweeping onward toward the misty shore,
No whit doth differ from its mate behind,
Its twin before.

A thousand leaves hang high on yonder tree.
What boots the single leaf amidst them all?
Not one shall stir or tremble if it see
Its neighbor fall.

This stranger shall depart as he hath come;
Upon the tolling hour he'll take his leave;
The past will soon engulf him and be dumb;
What should I grieve?

Yet all the while thou hadst me unaware,
Subdued, led captive ere I could divine;
Hadst interwoven by enchantment rare
Thy soul with mine.

Friend, I'll not miss thee in the shadow land;
For thee I'll keep an ever-wakeful eye,
To greet thee from afar and grasp thy hand
Ere thou go by.

THE BUILDERS

Who shall inhabit the mansion ye're building?
Whose coming shall loosen that ponderous door?
What eye shall delight in its carving, its gilding?
Whose revels re-echo from ceiling and floor?
Ye bondmen and serfs of obscure generation!
Ye drawers of water and hewers of stone!
Ye shape for an alien clan habitation
Where never the sound of your name shall be known.

Lift high the white column! set wide the pure portal
Which put all the strength of man's sinew to shame;
How they spurn thy frail flesh, thou corruptible mortal,
And mock the decay of thy pitiful frame!
Lay straight the broad architrave, rear the tall gable!
Whose summit shall flame in the insolent dawn;
And trace in quaint friezes of eloquent fable
Dull giants, slow Titans, whose children are gone.

Ay, mark the still flow of that fathomless labor!
Give ear to the music of hammer on bolt!
Hath no one a whisper or glance for his neighbor?
No gleam of rebellion, no breath of revolt?

Is there no soul that burns with a hate of the splendor?
No breast that heaves deep 'neath the merciless load?
No hands that forswear the vile tribute to render?
No voice to cry doom at the stroke of the goad?

Let the marble caress the smooth foot of the scorner;
Were it trampling the crown of thy skull 'twere the
same;

If an eye chance to catch a dark stain at the corner,
No tongue will deign ask from whose life blood it
came.

Yet surely the flood of God's anger is swelling,
To crush the false fabric, the ruins immerse,
And leave of that grandeur no tale for the telling
Save fame of an ancient, inscrutable curse.

LIFE'S DISCOUNT

They promise that the changing stars
Shall solace every care and woe,
And all that frets and all that mars
Shall vanish with the passing show.

They promise that the mounting sun
Shall gild our window with its light,
And many a deed that's ill begun
The happy morrow guide aright.

They promise that the budding year
Shall bring to harvest richer corn,
And turn to naught the hasty tear
And laugh the empty dread to scorn.

Meanwhile the bitter specters rage;
The haunting grief returns anew;
Tell me, ye prophets of the age,
How shall I live this moment through?

IN MEMORIAM R. T. N.

A whole life's treasure locked within thy breast,
They bear thee forth upon the destined way;
High thought and noble faith are laid to rest
In that spare coffin where they place thy clay.

So close and narrow is the earthy cleft
In which for aye thy placid limbs are pent,
So wide the void which thy parting left
In hearts of those with whom thy days were spent.

For loss of thee there is no recompense
Though gift were piled on gift an hundredfold;
New joys and blessings but beguile the sense—
The soul cries out for what it knew of old.

MORITURO

Die not as songs expire:

For while the last low note
Still faintly lingers in the cheated ear,
The fervid spirit, catching new desire,
Already longs to hear
Some buoyant prelude float
From a yet unwearied lyre.

Die not as the red sun sets;

For when his course is run
And the last rays slowly fade,
When from bold towers and soaring minarets
The burnished gleam hath gone,
Then patient toilers 'mid the gathering shade
Look up, and half dismayed,
Mark dumbly that an empty day is done.

Die thou as flowers depart;

Ere yet the bough hangs bare,
Each blossom close within its glowing heart
Hath garnered up a seed

To be its living heir.

Ere thou from hence to darker realm repair,

May such be eke thy meed,

Be such thy guerdon fair.

SEA SONG

To-night the wind has a breath of salt
Borne from a far-off sea,
Where the gulls flash white in the misty vault,
And the surf beats white on the lea.

To-night the air brings a touch of spray
Cool to the throbbing brow;
Light foam dashed up by the waves at play,
Or shot from a speeding prow.

To-night there's a muttered thunder-tone
Caught from a stormy strand,
Where a score of our comrades sleep unknown
In a grave of coral and sand.

THE LAST PLEA

Death, if thou wilt but stay thine hand,
Nor claim thy fated hour,
So shall I cast my treasures wide,
Scatter my store on every side,
Shower upon shower,
The weak and poor through all the land,
The sad and worn, from shore to shore,
Shall learn to bless for evermore
This gentler usage of thy power.

Death, if I might but move thy mind
To turn aside that blow,
So should a love for all mankind
This heart o'erflow;
Such solace in this touch should dwell,
Such mercy light this gaze,
That men should mark me as I go
And question in amaze.
Then shall thy servant speak thee well:—
'Twas Death who taught me so.

TO A DOLLAR

Round dollar! fitting type of a world as round!
How many hopes and fears and fancies dim,
Thou fatal disc, are held securely bound
Within thy narrow, corrugated rim.

Man is the measure of the universe,
The maxim of the ancient sages ran;
Thou hast remained sole standard since thou first
Becam'st the measure of the measure, Man.

THE DISILLUSIONED

I had wrapt me in song as a garment,
I had housed me in lore as a tent;
And I cared not to roam from the mystical home
Where the days of my dream should be spent.
I had laid me on couch of illusion
And Fancy had curtained me o'er,
Had spread me a roof of the gossamer woof
Woven by sages of yore.

But Life the resistless, eternal,
And Death with a rage never stilled,
Came and wasted the bed where I laid my head
And the dwelling I labored to build.
They set me adrift on the barrens,
Naked to blaze of the sun;
Life the resistless, eternal,
And Death, the omnipotent one.

Gray are the stretches of moorland;
Black are the reaches of sea;
There stirs not a breath o'er the desolate heath,
There bends not the twig of a tree.

The sky and the earth are empty;
The winds have all shuddered and fled;
The old ocean's throes are hushed in repose,
For she mourns not the waking dead.

The clouds are banded against me;
The forests have sworn me hate;
The birds of the air and the beasts of the lair
Make a jeer and a mock of my fate.
Ah! where is a token to guide me,
Some footprint to point me the way
Back, back to the shelter of shadows
From the glare of the pitiless day.

TO SIBYL

Nay, not to thee, thou wistful maid,
Mine autumn wreath of verse is brought;
Too much, too much have I essayed,
Too little wrought.

Like Ananias, cursed of old,
Shall I keep back the major part?
Proffer thee dross in change for gold,
Rhymes for a heart?

TO SIBYL

ON HER BIRTHDAY

I'd bear the double weight of years,
The double dole I'd bear,
To know thy cheeks unstained of tears,
Thy life immune of care.

I'd face that stealthy monster Time
With his silent stroke of snow,
To keep thee ever in thy prime,
Thy flame of youth aglow.

I'd lend my brow to be his scroll,
My form to be his prey,
Could thine go free from that stern toll
Safe from the world's decay.

And when delight had vanished hence,
And all my joys were done,
I'd bask within thy radiance
Like a beggar in the sun.

TO SIBYL

I should have sung of monarchs crowned,
Of sceptred princes in their pride;
Of far-off, haunted battle-ground
Where staunch crusaders bled and died.

I touched my harp with measured stroke
And hearkened to its charmèd tone;
Of thee the trembling sweetness spoke,—
Of thee alone, of thee alone.

TO SIBYL

The south wind calls to the wounded lark,

“How canst thou creep so low?”

The high surge sings to the shattered bark,

“Come, ride the ocean-flow.”

The sunbeam greets the blighted grain,

“Wilt thou sleep on so late;—

Ah, love! thy sweet voice all in vain

Assails my prison-gate.

TO SIBYL

Didst thou but know how buds the leaf,
How trills the wren his morning lay,
How gleams the wave beyond the reef,
Couldst thou still linger far away?

Ah, what avails the fairy scene,
The freshness of the woodland strain,—
To shine and sing for what hath been
And never more shall be again!

TO SIBYL

How little dreamed I that fair noon,
As we sat musing side by side,
What stretch of sea should part us soon,
What waste-land wide.

Could I but hope that this drear night
Might set my yearning spirit free,
Homeward to take unbroken flight,
And watch o'er thee!

TO SIBYL

Sibyl, amid the devious ways
That make the wide world's tangled maze,
Unerring Fate doth foreordain
That thou and I shall meet again.

I know not where our paths may touch,
Nor have I pondered overmuch.
Let Fortune choose her favored place
Once more to bring us face to face.

Ask me not then how time hath sped
Since our last fond adieus were said;
Nor if the long, long years between
Have found me rueful or serene.

Ask rather if my thoughts still hold
Those brief and fleeting hours of gold
When o'er our simple hearts held sway
The magic of one summer day.

THE ROOF-DWELLER

Mine is the ease and the balm,
Theirs is the wound and the hurt;
Mine is Heaven and its calm,
Theirs is the earth and the dirt.
I'm brother to the dove that cleaves
His white path through the air,
And neighbor to the ship that heaves
On oceans wide and bare.

Below the turbid alleys pour
Their flood into the avenue,—
Ten thousand and a thousand more,
A dark and nameless crew;
Thrust in between the wall and gutter,
Begrimed with mud and smoke,
Wind and jostle, cringe and flutter
A ghastly, silent folk;
For in and out the engines pass,
Grinding a ceaseless hum,
And hiss and shriek with tongues of brass
Till human speech grow dumb.

The multitude sways back and forth
As if it never could be still;
Strife without purpose, end or worth
Like ants upon a hill.
One wavering line crawls slowly east,
And one creeps feebly west;
Sweet time of pause for god and beast
Hath brought this tribe no rest.
They are not living, are not dead;
They reckon not of the night nor day;
'Tis but a sordid stage they tread,
A stale and tedious play.

I'm neighbor to the beacon light
That crowns a lonely tower;
And brother to the star whose flight
Measures the perfect hour.

THE WORKER

The world is large but the bed was small
On which an infant lay;
And Time is long, but the months were brief
For the carefree child to play.

The world is large, but the task was small;
Meager the work and the pay;
And Time is long, but the swift years heaped
The worker's head with gray.

The world is large, but the grave was small
Wherein an old man lay;
And Time is long, but the days were brief
Which crumbled him to clay.

THE QUEST

Somewhere in the sea of faces,
Maze of hands that never rest,
Wilderness of weary footsteps,
Moves the God for whom thy quest.

Somewhere in the throng of phantoms
Trooping down the narrow street,
Clad in garb of slave or master,
Walks the God whom thou wouldst greet.

Where the dizzy steel encages
Hordes of toilers tier on tier;
'Mid the whirl of clanging metal
Seek the God of Sorrow here.

Where the sunlight may not follow,
Where the breezes faint with fear,
Crowded cellar, teeming hovel,
Seek the God of Sorrow here.

Where the hidden battle rages,
Silent warfare surging blind,
Where the stricken cluster thickest,
Seek thy God and thou shalt find.

If perchance amid the humble
Even He seem lowliest,
Soon shall glance and gesture render
All His glory manifest.

TO THE SOUL

Animula vagula blandula.—HADRIAN.

Dear little soul, queer little soul,
Lost in a maze of clay,
Where is thy home and what is thy goal—
Wanderer waif and stray?

Hast thou come out of the infinite dark,
Out of the measureless void,
Quivering bubble, flickering spark,
Fragile, yet undestroyed?

Wan little soul! thou art doomed to descend
Into the night and the shade;
How shalt thou find the long way to the end,—
To Him who shall bless what He made?

RESIGNATION

I dare not wish it otherwise,
Nor importune the brazen skies
Till Heaven our dream fulfil.
That blended life we two had planned—
Two threads twined close in single strand,
Pregnant with joy, untouched of woe—
Art sure that we had found it so,
Had we our will?

Men set Desire upon a shrine,
And strew their garlands, pour their wine,
And pæans sing of praise.
Yet, while the censer-perfumes rise,
And blur the votary's fond eyes,
Hath flown the god apace.
Anon there dawns upon the sense
Through parting mists of pale incense
The half-forgotten lineaments
Of earth-born Sorrow's face;
She sits, crept in no man knows whence,
Throned in the holy place.

TO ONE FAITHLESS

Thou art gone; thou hast chosen unfettered
A bondage to shame;
Thy triumph I left unembittered
By a call on thy name.
I uttered no cry which could reach thee;
I shed not a tear;
I spoke not a word which could teach thee
My hope or my fear.

No need of the stern imprecation,
The solemn appeal;
No need of an hoarse lamentation
My soul to reveal.
Thou shalt wake to the sorrow before thee,
Shalt come to despair;
Then measure by love that I bore thee
The grief that I bear.

TO A WEAKER COMRADE

I will not yield thee to the world;
Be mine the conflict, mine the strife,
To bear the brunt of volleys hurled
And stand a sentry o'er thy life.

I'll still preserve thee uncorrupt,
Though we be led through orgies dire
Where sin holds revel, purple-cupped
Amid the wreck of high desire.

A thousand subtle arts may lure,
A thousand tempters weave their mesh;
I'll seat me in thy soul secure
To sway my scepter o'er thy flesh.

Of old I chose thee for mine own
And paid in tears thy ransom-price;
It shall not be that thou atone
When gods cry out for sacrifice.

I've staked the bounds of thy career
And marked thy paths inviolate;
That thou mayst tread them free from fear,
I set my shield 'twixt thee and fate.

THE STAR-GAZER

His eyes are dim with tracing the rim
Of the icy, alluring expanse;
His brain doth reel at the turn of the wheel
In the path of the stars' advance.

He hath marked their flight through the desert night
And the meteor's burning march,
And hath tuned his ears to the song of the spheres
That sounds through the infinite arch.

But ne'er hath he bent, ne'er hath he lent
Ear to a mortal cry,
Nor deemed aught worth the turbid earth
Where fallen comrades lie.

THE SERENADE

Was there music? Serenading?
Or a fitful whiff and whir,
As when pulsing midnight zephyr
Sets the forest leaves astir?
Is it moonlight? Is it starlight?
Or the dawn just breaking through
Where the snowy-curtained casement
Frames a lucid square of blue?

Once again, and not uncertain;
Sharper, clearer rings the strain,
Chasing wisps of dreamland fancy
From the half-awakened brain.
Rhythmic cohorts, lyric legions,
Onward, ever onward press;
While the starlight's soft effulgence
Penetrates each dim recess.

Man or woman? Stranger begging
Bitter crust from gate to gate?
Or some gentle bard repining
For a love left desolate?

Fainter now, but all a-tingle,
Scorning pause and interlude,
Soaring, speeding, trembling, groping,—
Melody for every mood.

Fairy tones,—ah, too beguiling!
Merciless your blandishment;
Shaking loose the folds of memory,
Rending cords of strong intent.
Silence,—and a soul in ashes;
Swept as with a breath of flame;
Sensing depths of mortal anguish
That a god might shrink to name.

Silence, and the lavish starlight
Pales and fades before mine eye;
Darkness tense and unrelenting
Fills the chamber where I lie.
Fare thee well, thou plaintive minstrel!
Though thy way be bare and lone,
May the song that woke my sorrow
Shed its charm to lull thine own.

LONGING

I seek her 'neath those ancient pines
Her youthful fancy held so dear;
The north wind mourns from the blasted bough,
"She is not here. She is not here."

I seek her by the blazing hearth
Where her sole presence made a home;
The grim clock tolls from the creaking shelf,
"She hath not come. She hath not come."

I seek her near the tranquil shrine—
Of old she loved the hallowed spot.
The stone god whispers through the gloom,
"She cometh not."

VESPER

The flowers wait by the roadside;
The tall trees watch on the hill;
And the old gray rocks and the tranquil flocks
Are holding vigil still.

The darkly-shining river
That circles the precipice
A secret keeps in her silent deeps—
From the world's first day to this.

The white ships rest at anchor
In the last pale gleam of the sun,
So indolent they seem but meant
To muse and gaze upon.

And the wide-winged bird of the marshes
Hath neared his journey's close;
The chime of bells in distant dells
Rings in the day's repose.

The smoke from the log-hewn hovel
Is wafted out o'er the stream;
And a silver mist the shores hath kissed
And wrought them to a dream.

But the lover lone, who tarried
And watched through weary hours,
Hath respite found on the grassy ground—
Asleep amid the flowers.

ALTER EGO

Thou dost not know thy second self,
Bright with the gleam of dawning day;
All free from taint of earthly dross,
Of mortal clay.

Thou hast not seen thy counterfeit,
Fashioned of purity alone;
Its every feature glorified
And yet thine own.

Thy double doth elude thee still;
It passeth silent as a star;
Its mien, its glance are thine, perchance,
Yet nobler far.

Wouldst thou that image seek and find,
And meet and greet thy counterpart?
High-altared in a soul it stands,
Shrined in a heart.

TO AN OLD BIBLE

Fresh flowers are pressed within thy clasp,
Dry, shattered leaves displacing;
Strange names are stamped upon thy front
Dim signatures effacing;

Deft fingers skim thy faded page
Which wrinkled hands turned slowly;
While keen eyes lightly scan the words
That lips, now dumb, called holy.

DAWN

The fire upon the hearth is spent and gone,
At the east window gleams a tinge of gray,
Bringing the stealthy message: Rise, my son!
This is thy day.

The bloom, I know, of joyous youth is dead;
For I have laid it in its winding-sheet,
And hidden far away, safe from the tread
Of sordid feet.

I know that many a comrade gone before
Hath faced the dreaded Shadow with a smile;
And yet perchance his very being's core
Shuddered the while.

I know the men of old spake words of cheer
To light our lonely pathway through the dark;
Yet I stand at the portal, cold and drear,
And find no spark.

Ah, well! A morning freshness stirs the air,
A roseate flush hath veiled the leaden sky;
Though God be deaf, still will I breathe one prayer
Before I die.

SYLVIA

Thou errant scion of the cloud and sky!

Thou recreant daughter of the wood and stream!
How art thou faithless to a lineage high,
How art thou fallen from a birth supreme!

Here on the rugged hillside's broad incline

Through summer days I dream vain dreams of thee,—
That thou might'st yet possess what long was thine,
Might'st yet become all thou wert born to be.

The cascade still brings echo of thy voice,

And still the fluttered leaf foretells thy tread;
The slender bough with which the night air toys
Calls benediction on thine absent head.

I cannot reach thee; but I'll charge the wind
With whispered tidings of profound import;
Command the roving sunbeam forth to find
The old-time comrade of his elfin sport.

For 'twas our faith that on the waning breeze
Full many a prayer and wish and silent thought
Amid the noonday twilight of the trees
From heart to heart is swiftly sent and brought.

It was our faith each ray of early dawn
Its own remote and subtle purpose knows,
Demurely stealing through the bended thorn
To wake no drowsy blossom from repose.

Oh thou, whom elemental Nature bare,
Return from exile to thy kingdom due;
Once more to virgin mountain-crest repair,
And claim thine ancient heritage anew.

Then though I pass from out this realm divine
To journey far on alien shores and seas,
My soul, for all the loss, shall not repine
To leave to thee the grandeur and the peace.

THE MIRACLE

I shut my soul in a wall of stone
The radiant face of Heaven to shun;
But a mystic light broke through and shone
With the hue of the rising sun.

I fled from the green of field and wood;
I set my step on the desert sand;
About my path rare blossoms stood,
Bending to meet my hand.

Beyond the bounds of kindred speech
I sought an isle in a wintry sea;
From each gray wave that smote the beach
A soft voice sang to me.

BELATED

Old stalk that hath lost thy leaf;
Whose ripened ear hath gone to swell the sheaf;
Why dost thou stand in harsh and gaunt relief
 Against the sunset glow?
Now blade and grain are shed,
Wilt thou not lay thee in thine earthy bed;
Lest thy frail husk be tattered shred by shred
 When the storm winds blow?

Old bird whose tune's a-hush;
Whose throat no more gay springtide lyrics flush;
Why dost thou swing atop yon fragrant bush,
 So mute, so dumb?
Wilt thou not seek thy nest;
There fold thee close for thine unbroken rest;
And hide from scorn a chill and empty breast
 Whence no songs come?

RETROSPECT

I trust, from those enchanted days
Thou wilt not draw thine anecdote
When round the board gay banter plays,
Or satire strikes its harsher note.

I trust that o'er each tender scene
Thou'lt throw such curtain of reserve
As no chance eye shall peer between,
No curious hand shall lift or swerve.

Ah! 'twas a fairy life we led,
Where e'en our tears were blissful things;
Though joy be past, and love be dead,
How rich the gift which memory brings.

Be faithful, then, to dream so fair,
Though we have broke our mutual tie;
And keep the hopes we buried there
Undesecrate from passers-by.

SONG OF THE CENTURIES

They say the world was fairer once,
A myriad years ago;
The woods, they say, wore brighter green,
The lakes a more resplendent sheen,
The hills a purer snow.

The streams that fell from those calm heights,
And sought the placid main,
Trilled as they went such tuneful sound
That nightingales in dells profound
Hushed at the magic strain.

Sweet Nature in her flush of youth,
With innocence aglow;
Unsullied yet by touch of men—
They say the world was fairer then,
Ten thousand years ago.

The world, they say, shall yet be fair
E'en as it was of yore;

For scarce an hundred cycles hence
A golden era shall commence
And last an hundred more.

The mountain rill shall then recatch
That evanescent tone;
The pristine glamour shall return,
And in the sky old fires shall burn
Rekindled at the throne.

And Love and Peace again hold sway
Through all the realm of sense.
The race of man, Time's chosen prey,
Shall utterly have passed away
An hundred cycles hence.

To-day, they cry, is full of gloom;
There is no tune to-day;
The earth enshrouds us, bleak, austere,
And life is torn 'twixt greed and fear.
For we have seen, they say.

Oh, that to-day a gleam might flash
Out of a living soul;
To light the chasms of the deep
And cast around each frozen steep
Its crimson aureole.

Oh, for a spirit harmony,
Reverberating strong,
To soothe the shrillness of the gale,
And overbear the ocean's wail
With an immortal song.

THE FAR CALL AND THE NEAR

Voices are calling from over the sea,
Calling and calling and calling to me,
Over the tides and over the billows,
Over the heights and over the hollows,
They come with the rush of the blast,
And I hear as they hasten past,

“Strive for us, strike for us,
Staunch to the last.”

Voices are murmuring up from the ground—
A tremulous, faint, uncertain sound
Like the drone of a homing bee.

From many a turf and many a mound

They whisper and whisper to me.
They whisper and whisper and seem to say—
Through twilight mists of tenuous gray
Half heard and half but guessed,—

“Hide thee here, bide thee here,
Sink to thy rest.”

PRAYER FROM A MOUNTAIN-TOP

On a granite ledge he lay,
Poised between cloud and sun,
In the glare of the crystal day
Where the sky and the earth are one.
On a granite ledge he lay,
Deep in the streams of air.
He uttered his voice to pray,
And this was his burden of prayer:

Spirit beyond the skies,
Spirit behind the dawn,
To thee my soul doth rise,
To thee my soul is drawn!
Up from the blackened urn,
Up from the smoking pyre,
For thee my soul doth yearn
And toward thee doth aspire;

Up to the throne of day,
Up from the night and the pain,
Till the flash of a golden ray
Shall burn my bonds in twain;

Till the clouds lie far behind
In the path of a soul set free
Through spaces unconfined
And sheer immensity.

Above are the stars and below—
Stars without number or name;
They meet and touch as they go,
And kindle flame on flame;
To the right are stars, to the left;
And myriad stars before;
And the blue of the heavens is cleft
By the glittering hosts that soar.

On winds that are swifter than light
The beat of new-born wings
Shall urge me on in my flight
Toward the heart and the pulse of things.
Spirit behind the dawn,
Spirit beyond the skies,
To thee my soul is drawn,
To thee my soul doth rise!

A PRAYER

Since man hath shunned the path of right
And strayed in ways of sin,
Fling wide, O Lord, the gates of light,
Gather the dumb brutes in.

In the haunts of men Thy name hath ceased;
Dead is the law divine;
Lord, set Thy seal on bird and beast,
Make them supremely Thine.

Thou canst lift up from every race—
Feathered and finned and furred,—
Children more worthy of Thy grace,
More reverent of Thy word.

FAILURE

I pause from the task unfinished.

The strong foundations bear
No broad and lofty mansion,
But an empty weight of air.

In the shrine of the destined goddess

There stands the unfeatured stone;
In the soil that the share hath furrowed
No seed of grain is sown.

The bark that set for the haven

With snowy sail flung wide,
Hath loosed her cord to wander
Adrift on the ebbing tide.

Oh, for a swift remission,

For silence and slumber and ease,
Where the noise and the dust and the tramping,—
Where the strain and the toil shall cease.

REMINISCENCE

There's tender charm in a fading scene;
A thrill profound in a falling strain;
And a subtle pleasure in recall
Of distant days once fraught with pain.

There's brilliance on the yellow leaf
A-tremble in the autumn breeze;
And sweetness in the lark's last note
Ere he wings his way toward southern seas.

Should some heed not my sojourn here,
Yet bid me, parting, warm God-speed;
Let me be well-content to leave
A memory deeper than my deed.

THE END

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